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RUP Occasional Paper No. 3

EXCHANGING CULTURE FOR POLITICS: STRATAGEMS OF RECOURSE TO TRIBE AND TRADITION IN DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE

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June 1986

1. INTRODUCTION

All individual modes of discourse about national and other development tendentiously conceal some of the realities involved, while ostensibly revealing others. Commentary and argumentation about development in Africa is not necessarily more prone to a peculiar and (in its context sometimes pernicious) recourse to a game of cultural utterance than is such commentary elsewhere. But it is no exception either.

The general subject of this paper (1) is the exploration of some common elements in utterance patterns in commentary on, and analysis of, public affairs and development. In brief: spoken or written recourse to a mode or style of cultural discourse is examined. Specifically the focus is on a development discourse, which turns heavily on 'culture exchanged for politics'. Since politics is partly about economics, one could add '... and for economics'. This paper aims to examine such exchange.

Argumentation about 'tribe' and 'tradition', whether in or about Africa (especially in the case of the former), Asia, Europe or elsewhere, is one of the commonest examples of such exchange. Sometimes patterns of utterance about public affairs are matters of analytical and methodological habit, simply, with no apparent serious intent. Sometimes the exchange will be done with deliberate intent; perhaps to conceal and defraud. In either case, however, the strategy and tactics which are followed may vary. Moveover, this paper's use of the exchange metaphor is not altogether appropriate. Deflection, substitution and various other gambits are involved. Thus this paper proceeds only with considerable reservations of its own about the description it starts with of what is after all a whole pattern of argumentation, which cannot very satisfactorily be reduced to just one of its parts. Why then proceed at all? Because, believe it at this stage or not, if deconstructive analysis is pursued of perceived cultural distance and recourse to peculiarly inclusive cultural utterance from which political and economic issues and logics are excluded on that plane virtually altogether, nothing less than what may prove to be a law of discourse and human communication emerges.

Is it not worth subjecting ourselves to some inconvenience in order to be in a position to be able to find this? The circumstances under which any form of a cultural (or other) style of utterance can, by its own lights, be effective, must be considered at the same time as that style or form 'itself'. It is the general rules, norms or forms institutionalised in culture or politics or economics (or all of these) that make particular plays or games possible (compare Durkheim on 'the institution of contract' and 'contract(s)'). But such 'forms' can effectively do this only if they are suitably 'found' by the player (think of the tennis star McEnroe 'finding his form' or not, as the case may be, and the ensuing consequences for his and his opponent's

fortunes). Academic approaches in the social sciences to 'structural/functional' and 'games' theory alike, constantly fail to address this parameter of 'finding form', because of their habit of simply subsuming the actual in the ideal in their most generalized formulations. Habitual patterns of speech and argumentation are not necessarily the most important winning or losing shots or encounters in plays or ploys. But they are seldom without influence altogether on the final outcome or score: 'knowing what to say: saying the right thing', is usually part of what counts in an interaction. Therefore development studies dare not neglect this zone.

'Tribe' and indeed 'tribalism' has long been the subject of heated debate in African studies of development and planning, and in other contexts. For instance, there has been much discussion about whether 'tribal' attitudes and actions can be precisely or only imprecisely identifiable in particular instances; are historically long seated or not; are about social or even asocial rather than political matters; are expressive of a territorial or a non-corporate identity; must be something true and authentic or are something false and perhaps invented; are a matter of primordial sentiment or subnationalism or for that matter nationalism; can be definable by a single trait such as language or only by a series of traits; are evidence of the existence and operation of a basic social or cultural unit or rather something more like an ideological idea; constitute, in effect, an ethnic identity long predating colonial culture contact and rule which through various educational and other processes has gradually become internationalised in a socialization process with various results. No doubt an even longer list could be composed of substantive possibilities which research in social science, ethnology and history has entertained. The research involved stems mainly from social anthropological thinking, in African and other studies, in the 1960s (2), and earlier.

Similarly, in what precisely 'tradition' in Africa and elsewhere in the world consists, has also often been the subject of substantive inquiries. For example it has been questioned whether this or that trait is necessarily tenacious or not in the face of economic change, is conducive or obstructive to this or that proposed development, and so forth.

These sorts of studies of 'tribe' and 'tradition' may be of considerable interest and ingenuity in themselves. Mostly however they miss entirely the extent to which, the occasions when, and the reasons why, people have or do not have recourse to these concepts, regardless of whether or not they are historically or ethnologically 'mistaken'. With patterns of word and will and sometimes deed, the context and purpose of argumentation and actions is seldom less important than the event of the 'text itself'. Yet this whole subject of the plans and meanings which are current and acted upon by a population escapes inquiry altogether in the conventional sorts of positivist and

essentialist inquiries that predominate in comparative development studies. There are traditions in social and economic research method to examine, as well as traditions in societies. However except in 'polemical' writing on 'schools' these are more often taken for granted than inquired into.

2. CULTURAL DISCOURSE AND PERCEIVED CULTURAL DISTANCE.

Some sorts of commentary and analysis about development conducted from afar, whether spatially or temporally, rely heavily on recourse to cultural discourse. What tends to happen in commentary carried out only at some considerable distance is that only cultural positions are taken where better informed analysis and judgement would want to take economic and political as well as cultural positions. After all, the development being examined is likely to be as much political and economic as well as cultural. Utterance about development not from afar, but at home, sometimes shows a similar tendency. Such cultural recourse as in these two instances may not be for the same reasons. Nonetheless there would be little point for example in looking for just two sets of reasons for such recourse, one for that in other countries, one for that in one's own. There would be little point either in looking for just two varieties of such discourse, one for poorer and one for richer countries. This may appear to make our task more difficult than otherwise it could be. Even for defined sets of situations, however the trumpeting of single explanations in comparative studies may tell us more about the issue of intellectual property and its management than the issue that is supposedly on the agenda.

Presumably any commentary which is carried out at some considerable distance from its subject, is likely to have access to little information of any kind. But if this considerable distance is taken to be a considerable cultural distance, then that much anyway is seemingly known about it. So matters could be worse. The 'gap' in political and economic information becomes filled by the cultural suppositions and assertions because they, at least, appear warranted. At the extreme, and by way of making up the deficit completely, cultural items are presented in the commentary not only as established facts but also as nothing but facts, and the whole facts. This same tendency however may persist even when fuller information is available, as in commentary from close at hand. This is why we have not just a stop-gap measure but an overriding and rather general discursive force to identify.

In broad outline, what appears to happen is this. Partly, heavy reliance on cultural discourse (RCD) is a function of perceived cultural distance (PCD). The greater the PCD of the topic at issue from the perceiver, would-be interlocutor or explainer, the greater the RCD.

Of course, this is not an unconditional phenomenon. So, what is its context and frame? Some of the conditionality is as follows:

(a) It is important that the explanatory quest should be for not just probability or good likelihood of fit, but for nothing less than absolute certainty of fit. For such discourse, only some form of absolute position could show mastery of the subject at issue. Further there is an underlying position: what is to be explained, or even just described, is 'in itself' so untoward, so strange, so elusive, that grasping it partly would be not to grasp it at all.

(b) A second necessary but still not sufficient condition is: what such commentary says it seeks is something which it believes to be very distinctive and particular, not something that in other circumstances and situations elsewhere would be seen, if in another version, to be familiar. So it looks for 'tribalism' rather than, say, 'localism'.

(c) Third the domain of culture should offer a peculiarly fertile hunting ground for such absolute certainty plus peculiar particularity. The conventional concept of 'culture' (since at least the nineteenth century) readily offers what seems to be required, namely something thought of as being transcendent but also as having immanent logic and validity of its own. This is the case as regards both beliefs and actual behaviour, between which RCD may draw no distinction. Conveniently, also, cultural identification and exegesis is scholastically and professionally a respectable, if somewhat arcane, task. It simply would not do for the best such commentary to stoop to popular and prejudiced utterance, for instance about irrationality and the like, that would be unlikely to offer much scope for a sharp and clear analysis anyway.

(d) PCD-RCD does not have to arise in all instances of allusion to 'tribe' or 'tradition' for it to arise in some. In discourse about particular tribes or traditions which are not believed by the speaker to be very different from each other ('I don't personally think that there is any more difference between the Ndebeles and the Shonas than there is between the Karangas and the Zezurus' may say a Shona or a Ndebele or indeed anyone else), PCD-RCD may be non-existent or weak (or, as in the instance just cited, displaced (and not all CD has necessarily PCD to handle).

(e) Stratagems of recourse in commentary to 'ancestral' tradition, i.e something deemed to be old if not immemorial and therefore distant in origin, even if it is believed further that some of that tradition either still exists or should be restored, involves PCD. Whether or not such and such a tradition did actually exist, substantively, long ago or for that matter ever, it is posited that it did. An example from agrarian utterance illustrates this perfectly (and will therefore be given at this juncture at some length). 'African land tenure' of a type in

Eastern and Southern Africa deemed 'traditional' and as such coming up for frequent mention in rural development planning, is a very common case of substituting merely cultural positions for cultural plus political plus economic positions. For example, it will be said just that 'traditional' land holding was based just on 'allocation' by rulers, 'rulers' here being regarded as 'natural' authorities for this purpose, not as political or economic agents with interests of their own as well as of others at stake.

This is precisely a kind of saying that conceals more than it reveals. In it 'allocation' - precisely as in so many other of its usages and referents in development studies - both assumes a whole process of administration (in the sense of assuming it away) and ignores even the logistics of such administration. As a result the entire political economy of land thus gets left aside. Worse, through the particular means chosen of leaving all this aside, what is thus obviated gets ruled out as being of no consequence anyway ('land is plentiful'). Instead there will at best be only some restricted debate as to whether rights of avail are more germane to the situation than rights of ownership, or whether reversionary rights operate on the moving away (or the decease) of a holder, and,if so, with what effects (4).

Now admittedly to take up any debate at all on the matter of reversionary rights as a substantive issue is already to move away from only formal, constitutional, issues. It moves a little away, too, from that cultural depiction which is always of a supposed equilibrium state of affairs, a state which becomes ruffled or disturbed only by exotic factors such as the spread of cash economy - 'cash here meaning individual in some sense and 'traditional' signifying collective or communal. But what is still not addressed is nothing so awkward and possibly nasty as power relations. Not even moderate exchange values are allowed to enter the picture before the said impact on it of cash economy (5).

Worse, absence (immemorial being long ago and far away) of data on such matters is read as meaning that no such data is necessary: there is no purpose for which such data is required.

But could this in actuality really have been the case? If land had to be allocated, then obviously it was not a free good. Surely it must therefore have been scarce and valuable to some extent - land everywhere varies in its positional value if nothing else. Physically its extent and ecology and so forth will vary as well. So, whether land rights in systems deemed traditional (read 'communal'), were or were not or are or are not of usufruct not ownership, subject or not to reversion, and so on, politics and economics must always have been part of the total picture and actual operation. It is therefore inconceivable that nothing but cultural traits and ideas were or are involved. Yet such inconceivability simply does not even arise. RCD takes

its place instead.

With what practical results? For one thing, in such cultural discourse little if any distinction is drawn between for instance land as territory, that is as political territory, and land as a means or factor of production and distribution. All land gets to be treated as if it were just one kind of land. Totally excluded also is analysis of the extent to which religious land under whatever regimen is treated religiously (as well as politically and economically), border areas are treated diplomatically and politically (as well as culturally and economically and so on), crop or grazing land is treated agriculturally (as well as culturally and politically and so on), and so forth (6).

(f) Another conditionality is in regard to source material. Where PCD-RCD operates, there is a particular problem of source to overcome. Therefore some specially authoritative or authorized source must be found to carry the heavy burden. Then a distant outsider can really say or believe that he or she is getting a close-up insider´s view! The greater the distance, however, the more difficult it is to come by such a source that offers both the required certainty and the expected distinctiveness of the message sought. But fortunately, miraculously, it turns out that authorized cultural utterance is not unavailable altogether! Indeed on what, in the hazy circumstances, could great reliance better be placed than on the clear and strident declarations by a President or Chairman or Chief! From even the most distant of lands, such repositories of authority are seldom silent. Typically, oracles like to take up even the most transcendent of cultural matters. Moreover they are given to official pronouncements that are often translated (or were actually prepared in the first place for foreign dissemination anyway). ´Culturally we are a classless nation´; ´our way is ´the African´ or ´the European or whatever way´. Such elucidations are supposed to be the very epitomes of cultural distinctiveness.

To give added authenticity, some key words which serve as uniquely descriptive (but also prescriptive (7)) terms will be tantalizingly left in the original. Verisimilitude can thus appear to speak for itself (to hearers who do not speak that language). Contrast the runs that ´ujamaa´ and ´Humanism´ enjoyed in the 60s and early 70s in their respective official discourses in eastern Middle Africa. It would be difficult not to conclude that the shakier passage of the latter was due partly to its appearance, as it were nakedly, in English. The verisimilitude RCD seeks is one of uniqueness and distinctiveness, not of comparison, or even of comparability. A suitable language is required accordingly.

So, for the consumer from afar, just as demanded, there turns out to be a unique and highest-level supply of RCD across great PCD. Our function is complete.

At home, just CD as well as RCD are never as non-controversial as from afar they may appear to be. This could be owing to any number of political and economic processes, repression and exploitation included, as well as to quite innocent pursuits. However it is unlikely that the official pronouncements which constitute the available material will even allude to any of these

(g) The greater the R in RCD, the sharper will be the focus on valuation of the culture or cultural item concerned. Normally either an absolutely negative, or an absolutely positive valuation prevails, nothing in between: shades of valuation are out. Maoist China from afar was either a heaven on earth or a hell on earth, its Chairman either a god or a devil. Ujamaa-ist Tanzania seen from afar was similarly perceived (its president either 'the only President in Africa of unquestionably good intentions' or 'a ruthless - and dangerous and skillful - opportunist'). In either case really any kind of moderated discussion at all (e.g. to speak of 'certain errors of policy such that Tanzania's agricultural crisis was partly of its own making') is virtually ruled out.

Thus especially as it may be represented externally, nationalism at first in this sort of context makes its mark more as a matter of RCD than substantive history. As such this is an 'ism' with more (certain kinds of) political and economic input internationally than nationally. If nationalism is thus also internationalism, it is not an obstacle or an alternative to internationalism.

(h) Something or someone coming out of the perceived, and into the perceiving, world, and not fitting in with the preconceived valuation, will be treated as a categorical exception. ('When an actual freed and literate slave, Job ben Solomon, appeared in Georgian London, he delighted the capital's society and did not change the slaver's habits. As Montesquieu had noticed in 1748, Europeans could not consider Africans as men "because, allowing them to be men, a suspicion would follow that we ourselves are not Christian". Thus ben Solomon had to be treated as an exception, as an African prince'(8).

Academic disciplines as well as societies and individuals engage in such exchanges ('Before 1926, when Malinowski's work on crime and sex and repression in what he ironically termed 'Savage Society' began to be published, anthropology had already developed from collecting the quaint habits of primitive peoples, in order to prove their inferiority and lawlessness, into a total effort to record their tribal lives, in order to prove that they were wholly bound by totem and taboo and group - in fact, that they were the most law abiding people on earth'(9)).

(i) A further tendency is for RCD to be shaped by the analytic conventions of the method of review and assessment chosen. The

weaker these conventions in their provision to deal with now not RCD or CD or even C but just c, compared with the better provision made in these same conventions to deal with economics and perhaps politics also, the stronger the role assigned to them will be.

This is paradoxical. Recourse to such conventions in effect end up by taking a view, whether actively or passively, that one particular element - c - in the whole is particularly important or unimportant. But at the same time it confesses its inadequacy to deal with this one element, either at all or satisfactorily. So, entirely because of the conventions of the method of analysis or commentary chosen, 'c' gets to be either maximised or minimised. Again nothing in between is entertained.

(j) Finally, no doubt a fuller analysis of configurations of recourse to cultural utterance in commentaries and analyses about development and planning would reveal several other features to those sketched here. Not least, culturally there will be some constraints and rules to be observed, for instance as to what can and cannot be said without fear of immediate counter-effect. Also, by whom and how and when cultural argumentation about development arises, will to some extent vary from culture to culture. This too is a zone of conditionality for a fuller analysis to determine. All that is being attempted in the present paper is an initial and exploratory scene-setting. A further phase of such inquiry would be that of comparison, across different cultures, of contrasting cases.

Nevertheless, what may prove to be involved is nothing less than something of the order of a universal. The greater the PCD, the greater RCD. This is not necessarily a lineal relationship, especially as the commonest concepts of culture involved or acted upon are qualitative concepts. 'Cultural distance' is more likely to be exponential than linear in form (to continue with analogies). One could sum this up by saying that recourse to cultural utterance and discourse as in the circumstance described above, may have virtually the status of a law of human communication: the law of the square of the perceived cultural distance.

3. 'THE THIRD WORLD'

Of all single cases of exchanges of culture for politics and economics in the field of development and international relations, the chief candidate for the accolade of highest PCD-RCD content must be: the image and label 'The Third World' (12). The commonest, anodyne, recourse to this phrase continues to be close to that in its original coinage. Partly this origination was in a reference to a congeries of (different rather than powerful) 'indigenous cultural traditions' which new political kingdoms had brought or were bringing on to the world

stage.

Nothing less than 'a post World War II caesura' is said to be involved, or even 'the most powerful image possibly in the whole of the twentieth century'. Its perceived content of culture is very close to Karl Popper's 'third world' (probably the terminological similarity is coincidental) of myths and sensations as data which belong neither to art nor science. What was even more at issue was an invention of a world that was supposedly neither capitalist nor socialist, but a world just of or for planned change, development, popular participation, decentralization and structural change and the like. The Third World image exchanges culture for both capitalist and socialist politics and economics, in 'its' internal and external relations alike. Any matters of politics and economics which do break through this would-be wholesale cultural disguise, are surprises, shocks, even crises. Talk begins of intervention, stabilization, and the like.

Social labels may be supposed to describe the contents of the merely containers to which they are affixed. But subtly they may also seek to persuade the audience of the value of these contents i.e. to prescribe as well as to describe. 'The Third World' has no internal politics, but only culturics ('suprisingly the Blacks in South Africa are not united' said the Time or Newsweek in some initial reporting of some recent events there).

The recent appearance on the international scene of language of non-geographical, even ageographical but seemingly spatial, expressions (North and South) is a further culturalization in RCD now of space - especially-economic space - rather than of persons, groups, or worlds. It has some advantages (Japan which formerly had to be squeezed into the West can now be allocated less inconveniently to North). Polarities are anyway easier to handle in utterance about mutuality (such as in the Brandt Report), than trilateralities, for dramatic effect. While seemingly repelling they are poles of attraction too. Middle of the road, equatorial, theories of truth, have much less appeal to either polar party.

4. THE SUBSTANTIVE BEHIND THE DISCURSIVE

The impression may have been given in this paper that, while there is always something discursive in or behind the substantive, there is nothing substantive in the discursive. This, however, is not necessarily so.It is far from being the case for instance with PCD-RCD commentary for instance on voting patterns ('the Langi were loyal to Obote') or, indeed, what is called a lack of tribal base ('Nyerere comes from a very small and not powerful tribe'). Undoubtedly there are, among other patterns in voting and other acts, regional or subregional and if you will ethnic patterns as well. But PCD-RCD discourse practice,

whether deliberated or habitual, singles out only these patterns from all others and then pretends that others do not exist. As with any discourse practice, the reasons and other circumstances involved in this particular case vary too. But some recurring features stand out. One common feature is, again, a form of reductionist commentary. Very commonly culture is reduced to just one basic organizing principle or unit ("African culture is basically tribal culture"). Such commentary on African political and economic development ('KANU has favoured the Kikuyu') is still one of the commonest kinds of commentary in African studies. Home-grown PCD-RCD in this form (even in a double sense: 'If you have people in the ruling party who fall into the trap of talking tribalism because they are frustrated by the problems of Matabeleland they will actually be helping parochial nationalists who want to create problems') offer ready-made reinforcements for culturalisms from without.

A second common feature of such exchanges of culture for politics and economics is for affirmations which at least have the merit of starting out as being pluralist in some sense ('Obote rules by tribalism, nepotism and repression'),to end up by forgetting this as it were promisingly variegated start. What happens instead of bringing forth something more qualified is that argumentation returns to just tribalism alone, finding it guilty by association. But what gives it this negative character is not even established, let alone analysed. Under PCD-RCD rules of commentary, politics and economics - in the case under discussion nepotism and repression - are exchanged for just culture - here tribalism. Any realistic analysis would require descriptive demonstration of such associations at least. Again, little of the pertinent political and economic information is available (until revealed not by a Commonwealth Commission majority-opinion in the case recently of Uganda but by Amnesty International and even a Private Eye). Certainly some information is likely to be unavailable simply for the reason that it is supposed to be kept secret.

'Maoism' is one example of culturalization in the form of personalization of economics and politics. Other examples would be 'Nixonomics', 'Reaganomics', 'Thatcherism' and so forth. As with other forms of (or rivals to) PCD-RCD, mostly this personalization form is similarly structured as being either strongly positively or strongly negatively valued. There are few nuanced positions. However, such culturalization is not very familiar in African affairs. More characteristic are simply personifications of politics and economics, such as personal names like 'Nkrumah' and 'Kenyatta' conjure up. Such personification might have something to do with conditions under which tripartite fusions of images of state, government and nation are possible and perhaps required. This is also true elsewhere of expressions such as 'fathers' of nations or conquest states and what is above all at first new international status. In Africa, the 'ics' or 'isms' these heads of State, Party and

Government embrace at any given time, are usually not personalised. More commonly they are borrowed standards, such as 'socialism'. For home as well as foreign consumption, any other kind of recourse may appear as at best unnecessary or dangerous to those who would depend on it.

A domestication function served by symbolization of the Head person concerned (for example, 'Mzee' or 'Mwalimu', is convenient where, as in particular kinds of RCD, PCD is or should be minimal or non-existent. Also this is a discursive context in which one-party state ideas can circulate easily (already at one discursive remove from government), not as no-party but one-party representations. Externally, as PCD increases, this can be read as a party-based organization even if, for RCD-expressed reasons, there is only one party.

Certainly some sorts of exchange and other effects of discursive structures of policy commentary and argumentation work in this way. Thus policy analysis does not always have to limit itself to matters of interests and values before a serious assessment of policy could be essayed. Of course this is not to say that interests and values are not at stake as well as discourse. Rather it is that the semantics of development and development strategies and development analysis repay attention as guides also to politics and economics as well as semantics.

A third feature is that if, on the basis of other information, one were actually to try to look realistically into political and economic dimensions, the preferred cultural thrust of the discourse could be weakened. Thus it may be made to appear that such other information is not wanted. Culture is a conveniently uniform blanket when it is seen as something that is common to a population. A population is then called a people, with a culture that is shared by all equally, regardless of rank, gender and occupation. Per contra, by definition, nepotism is selective: included are some persons, excluded are some other persons. Repression is similar yet also something different again: without at least some degree of compliance from the repressed groups, in theory and practice as well one suspects, such dominance would be impossible.

When PCD-RCD makes reference rather to 'tradition' than to 'tribe', a wider discursive strategy may be involved: not least, one tradition may be common to more than one tribe. This strategy is also worthy of notice. One feature is that a President or Chief appealing to 'our cultural tradition' in an official pronouncement on a substantive development policy or programme, may be so doing - be obliged so to do - because there is no other accessible legitimacy to appeal to, for example, a democratic and political legitimacy. Such appeals link with variations on a further theme, namely cultural utterance about economy. Cultural polemics of this sort are about what modernizationists and others in development studies call 'political culture' and 'economic

culture´.They attribute the legitimacy, or success, or failure, or some other quality of a policy not to economics or politics but to the culture of economics or of politics.

In mid 1982, a BBC talk by a former Philippine Senator who had by then become a civil rights lawyer, taking an opposition stance to the Marcos regime, took up this subject dramatically. He observed: "Two justifications for authoritarianism are currently fashionable in Asian developing countries. One is that Asian societies (culturally and traditionally) are authoritarian and paternalistic and so need governments which are also authoritarian and paternalistic; that Asia´s hungry masses are too concerned with filling their own stomachs to concern themselves with civil liberties and political freedoms; that, in short, Asians are not fit for human rights. Another is that developing countries must sacrifice freedom temporariy to achieve the rapid economic development that their exploding populations (and shrinking resources) and rising expectations demand. In short, that governments must be authoritarian to promote development"(10)

It would not be difficult to find a number of similar instances in African argumentation about human rights and development. This Filipino lawyer´s response to the problematic he poses for his own country so clearly is also familiar in some African positions: "The first justification is racist nonsense. The second is a lie; authoritarianism is not needed for development; what it is needed is to maintain the status quo. Development is also people deciding what food, clothing and shelter are adequate and how these are to be provided".

Of outside attributions of development to ´tradition´ not in the case of the continuity but the collapse of a status quo, examples may also be drawn from outside Africa. Was not the fall of the Shah in Iran blamed on an ancient moral and religious code which provoked an almost metaphysical rebellion against modernization by one of the chief spokesmen of the US foreign policy which was then ruined?(11). Admittedly, what were called ´legitimate´ grievances were blamed too. Nevertheless it was Iran´s social and religious traditions that were made to carry most of the burden.

One supposition such utterance makes is that such traditions are not themselves political and economic as well as cultural. Another is that the toppled regime was ´untraditional´. Neither supposition (in the case of Iran) can be sustained in the face of better informed commentary for long. However, the extent to which cultural utterance, either from within or from without, is substantively well-based or not, is not this paper´s subject (admittedly it has not been completely left out either). Rather its concern is with a pattern of thought, word and will in which, regardless of whether such saying is also believing on the part of those expressing themselves in this way, there is a peculiarly heavy recourse to cultural utterance. Often, such saying is no

less instrumental than believing even where it is not believing also. It may, indeed, be more instrumental, perhaps particularly in cases of habitual rather than incentived practice.

Stratagems of international commentary about development in Africa seldom accord 'tradition' any similar role to that in the non-African instance just cited. One reason is that they start from an assumption that 'African' - unlike for instance 'Asian' - traditions lack great moral and religious power and pedigree. 'African' here may be contrasted with, for instance, 'Arab' and 'Christian' tradition. Africa-watchers have little if any recourse to fundamentalism as a cultural (and political and economic) force, other than in micrological instances.

5. WITH WHAT PRACTICAL EFFECTS?

A virus, while harmless to its host, may be highly lethal after crossing a species barrier. As with the disease Aids, so with PCD-RCD, in looking for the practical effects of either, one must at times distinguish between host or bearer and victim. This was necessary when the role of the substantive in the discursive was addressed in the preceding section of this paper. Some practical effects of recourse to cultural discourse were brought out there explicitly. The chief net effect of such (over) generous exchanges of culture for politics as have now been discussed, from the academic point of view of a political economy of words and deeds which have practical consequences in policy and planning, is an evasion of analysis. So blatant can this evasion appear at times, that one may find it difficult not to call it deliberate evasion. Admittedy, specious apolitical, asocial, ahistorical and ageographical positions could be due as much to sheer poverty of ideas and information as to ruthlessness. Still, efforts that constantly seek to present public affairs as if they were just matters of culture alone are peculiar at best. In policy and planning there are always interests at stake, as well.

One effect, then, is evasion. Another is blockage: in two senses. Political and economic issues are camouflaged behind a cultural front. This we have seen throughout this paper. In addition, analysis of culture as one dimension among others with the interrelations with these others being part and parcel of the total situation, is blocked too. A path to a type of commentary or policy about development which obfuscates rather than illumines these interrelations, is a path to no real commentary or policy at all.

In politics, the intended practical effects (which of course may or may not be achieved) of 'tribalism' discourse, came within the scope of Bob Fitch and Mary Oppenheimer's illuminating early (1966) study of Independent Ghana and its economic development "Ghana: end of an illusion". They looked into the framing of the

frame, as an integral part of the actual practice of discourse. They analysed the case of an 'opposition' (the NLM) deemed Right by the (CPP) government in power as being commonly a candidate for a tribal, religious, regional label when the reigning political platform described itself as for unity and national goals. They compared tribe-baiting in Ghana then, to red-baiting in the USA then, but went on to show something of the different levels of ideological and other sophistication that both the throwing of such labels at others, and the wearing of them oneselves, involved. Their conclusion was "that NLM 'tribalism' owed more to Margery Perham and to Radcliffe-Brown than to the Mau Mau rebellion" and,"included arguments that might have been advanced by a Madisonian structure-functionalist". Economically they drew our attention to the roles of Ashanti Chiefs as landowners and traders, roles as distant from those just of allocation as one can imagine.

To move nearer the present time while remaining in West Africa, The Economist's (1984) Brief on The political economy of Nigeria (at p.9) compares the blaming of ills on to 'tribalism' with just the blaming of 'politics' for development errors, lapses or obstacles. Its conclusion: "the explanation 'tribalism is an admission that the speaker does not understand what is going on ... The astute observer always bears tribalism in mind, but never relies upon it as a sufficient explanation".

So far as such a statement goes (ignoring the politics of ignorance and so on), so good. This paper, however, in an initial and tentative way, has attempted a broader examination. For example it has looked for some of the context in which discourse of a particular sort could be believed to be efficacious and therefore worth using. One must assume, up to a point (which has something to do with the limits of intellectualism), that if such cultural recourse in argumentation were not considered to be capable of having practical effect (whether instrumental or expressive), it would not be so persistent. For criticism in development planning and other studies just to announce that such discourse is 'wrong', is futile or itself no less 'mistaken' than what it rejects.

Similarly, research on 'tribalism' that is confined only to positions about the substantive or historical accuracy or otherwise of sayings and beliefs about 'trib?' and 'tradition', can equally turn out to be as petty and pernicious as the subject it addresses. This paper, in an effort to chart a characteristic zone of development discourse, has looked for a way out of confining discussion so to say of tribalism to tribalism. The 'ism' involved is identifiable on a wider plane of argumentation and communication about public policy and affairs.

FOOTNOTES

1. For four other analyses of thought-word-will patterns about development strategies, see my Agricultures and strategies: the language of development policy in E. Clay and B.B. Schaffer, editors, Room for manoeuvre: an exploration of public planning in agricultural and rural development, Heinemann, London 1984; "Reading and pleading rural development policy: in R. Grillo and A. Rew, editors, Anthropology and public policy. Tavistock, London, 1985; 'Development planning discourse' in a forthcoming special number of Public Administration and Development, London 'Institutions and development: Bernard Schaffer's grammar of offical provision', November, 1986; 'Social labelling and agricultural development: Communal Land or District Land in Zimbabwe?' in a forthcoming issue of Land Use Policy, Butterworth, London, October, 1986.

2. June Helm, editor, Essays on the problem of tribe. Proceedings of the 1967 Annual Spring-Meeting of the American Ethnological Society, University of Washington Press, Seattle,, 1968;s, Seattle, 1968: Philip Gulliver, editor, Transition and tradition in east Africa, London 1970; Aidan Southhall, 'The illusion of tribe' Journal of African and Asian Studies, 1970; Archie Mafeje, 'The ideology of tribalism' Journal of modern Studies, 1971.

3. This and other texts which illustrate this paper come from simply some media sources currently (September 1985) to hand, e.g. Zimbabwe News, The Times, The Economist, The Guardian Weekly, time, etc.

4. C.M.N. White (....) in D., Biebuyek editor, African agrarian systems O.U.P. and International African Institute, London, 1964.

5. C.M.N. White, see f.n.4, did not make this mistake. Indeed I am personally indebted to him for my induction in Zambia (in 1959), into land matters and this regard of exchange.

6. This was a central point in my 'Land law and land policy in Eastern Africa', in J. Obot Ochol, editor, Land law reform in East Africa, Kampala, 1969: Uganda Press Trust and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

7. One policy-oriented position, description,is often confused in development studies, with another, prescription. This could be the focus of a series of comparative analyses of development strategies and their outcomes. Social labelling may in effect aid such fusion, among other things, whether it was so originally intended to do or not.

8. Andrew Sinclair, The Savage: a history of misunderstanding, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977; p.49.

9. Idem, P. 188

10. Jose Diokno, The Listener, London, 1984 (further details not available at present).

11. H. Kissinger, The White House Years

12. Edward Horesh, in 1985 Geof Wood, see f.n.1.

13. Bob Fitch and Mary Oppenheimer, Ghana: end of an illusion, Monthly Review Press, New York and London, 1966.

This paper, first presented at the DSA Conference, University of Bath, September 1985, was prepared after teaching at RUP.

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